PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS IN THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

ANURADHA GHANDY

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Anuradha Ghandy

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Foreword

"....But Anuradha was different"
Arundhati Roy

That is what everyone who knew Anuradha Ghandy says. That is what almost everyone whose life she touched thinks.

She died in a Mumbai hospital on the morning of 12 April 2008, of malaria. She had probably picked it up in the jungles of Jharkhand where she had been teaching study classes to a group of Adivasi women. In this great democracy of ours, Anuradha Ghandy was what is known as a 'Maoist terrorist,' liable to be arrested, or, more likely, shot in a fake 'encounter,' like hundreds of her colleagues have been. When this terrorist got high fever and went to a hospital to have her blood tested, she left a false name and a dud phone number with the doctor who was treating her. So he could not get through to her to tell her that the tests showed that she had the potentially fatal malaria falciparum. Anuradha's organs began to fail, one by one. By the time she was admitted to the hospital on 11 April, it was too late. And so, in this entirely unnecessary way, we lost her.

She was 54 years old when she died, and had spent

more than 30 years of her life, most of them underground, as a committed revolutionary.

I never had the good fortune of meeting Anuradha Ghandy, but when I attended the memorial service after she died I could tell that she was, above all, a woman who was not just greatly admired, but one who had been deeply loved. I was a little puzzled at the constant references that people who knew her made to her 'sacrifices.' Presumably, by this, they meant that she had sacrificed the comfort and security of a middle-class life, for radical politics. To me, however, Anuradha Ghandy comes across as someone who happily traded in tedium and banality to follow her dream. She was no saint or missionary. She lived an exhilarating life that was hard, but fulfilling.

The young Anuradha, like so many others of her generation, was inspired by the Naxalite uprising in West Bengal. As a student in Elphinstone College, she was deeply affected by the famine that stalked rural Maharashtra in the 1970s. It was working with the victims of desperate hunger that set her thinking and pitch-forked her into her journey into militant politics. She began her working life as a lecturer in Wilson College in Mumbai, but by 1982 she shifted to Nagpur. Over the next few years, she worked in Nagpur, Chandrapur, Amravati, Jabalpur and

Yavatmal, organizing the poorest of the poor — construction workers, coal-mine workers — and deepening her understanding of the Dalit movement. In the late 1990s, even though she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she went to Bastar and lived in the Dandakaranya forest with the People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) for three years. Here, she worked to strengthen and expand the extraordinary women's organization, perhaps the biggest feminist organization in the country — the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan (KAMS) that has more than 90,000 members. The KAMS is probably one of India's best kept secrets. Anuradha always said that the most fulfilling years of her life were these years that she spent with the People's War (now CPI-Maoist) guerillas in Dandakaranya. When I visited the area almost two years after Anuradha's death, I shared her awe and excitement about the KAMS and had to re-think some of my own easy assumptions about women and armed struggle. In an essay in this collection, writing under the pseudonym Avanti, Anuradha says:

As we approach March 8, early in the dawn of this new century remarkable developments are taking place on the women's front in India. Deep in the forests and plains of central India, in the backward villages of Andhra Pradesh and up in the hills among the tribals in the state, in the

forests and plains of Bihar and Jharkhand women are getting organized actively to break the shackles of feudal patriarchy and make the New Democratic Revolution.

It is a women's liberation movement of peasant women in rural India, a part of the people's war being waged by the oppressed peasantry under revolutionary leadership. For the past few years thousands of women are gathering in hundreds of villages to celebrate 8 March. Women are gathering together to march through the streets of a small town like Narayanpur to oppose the Miss World beauty contest, they are marching with their children through the tehsil towns and market villages in backward Bastar to demand proper schooling for their children.

They are blocking roads to protest against rape cases, and confronting the police to demand that the sale of liquor be banned.

And hundreds of young women are becoming guerrilla fighters in the army of the oppressed, throwing off the shackles of their traditional life of drudgery. Dressed in fatigues, a red star on their olive green caps, a rifle on their shoulders, these young women brimming with the confidence that the fight against patriarchy is integrally linked to the fight against the ruling classes of this semi-feudal, semi-colonial India, are equipping themselves with the military knowledge to take on the third largest army

of the exploiters. This is a social and political awakening among the poorest of the poor women in rural India. It is a scenario that has emerged far from the unseeing eyes of the bourgeois media, far from the flash and glitter of TV cameras. They are the signs of a transformation coming into the lives of the rural poor as they participate in the great struggle for revolution.

But this revolutionary women's movement has not emerged overnight, and nor has it emerged spontaneously merely from propaganda. The women's movement has grown with the growth of armed struggle. Contrary to general opinion, the launching of armed struggle in the early 1980s by the communist revolutionary forces in various parts of the country, the militant struggle against feudal oppression gave the confidence to peasant women to participate in struggles in large numbers and then to stand up and fight for their rights. Women who constitute the most oppressed among the oppressed, poor peasant and landless peasant women, who have lacked not only an identity and voice but also a name, have become activists for the women's organizations in their villages and guerrilla fighters.Thus with the spread and growth of the armed struggle the women's mobilization and women's organization have also grown, leading to the emergence of this revolutionary women's movement, one of the strongest and most powerful women's movements in the country today. But it is unrecognized

and ignored, a ploy of the ruling classes that will try to suppress any news and acknowledgement as long as it can.

Her obvious enthusiasm for the women's movement in Dandakaranya did not blind her to the problems that women comrades faced within the revolutionary movement. At the time of her death, that is what she was working on — how to purge the Maoist Party of the vestiges of continuing discrimination against women and the various shades of patriarchy that stubbornly persisted among those male comrades who called themselves revolutionary. In the time I spent with the PLGA in Bastar, many comrades remembered her with such touching affection.

Comrade Janaki was the name they knew her by. They had a worn photograph of her, in fatigues and her huge trademark glasses, standing in the forest, beaming, with a rifle slung over her shoulder.

She's gone now — Anu, Avanti, Janaki. And she's left her comrades with a sense of loss they may never get over. She has left behind this sheaf of paper, these writings, notes and essays. And I have been given the task of introducing them to a wider audience.

It has been hard to work out how to read these writings.

Clearly, they were not written with a view to be published as a collection. At first reading they could seem somewhat basic, often repetitive, a little didactic. But a second and third reading made me see them differently. I see them now as Anuradha's notes to herself. Their sketchy, uneven quality, the fact that some of her assertions explode off the page like hand-grenades, makes them that much more personal.

Reading through them you catch glimpses of the mind of someone who could have been a serious scholar or academic but was overtaken by her conscience and found it impossible to sit back and merely theorize about the terrible injustices she saw around her. These writings reveal a person who is doing all she can to link theory and practice, action and thought. Having decided to do something real and urgent for the country she lived in, and the people she lived amongst, in these writings, Anuradha tries to tell us (and herself) why she became a Marxist-Leninist and not a liberal activist, or a radical feminist, or an eco-feminist or an Ambedkarite. To do this, she takes us on a basic guided tour of a history of these movements, with quick thumb-nail analyses of various ideologies, ticking off their advantages and drawbacks like a teacher correcting an examination paper with a thick fluorescent marker. The insights and observations sometimes lapse into easy sloganeering, but often they are profound and occasionally they're

epiphanic — and could only have come from someone who has a razor sharp political mind and knows her subject intimately, from observation and experience, not merely from history and sociology textbooks.

Perhaps Anuradha Ghandy's greatest contribution, in her writing, as well as the politics she practiced, is her work on gender and on Dalit issues. She is sharply critical of the orthodox Marxist interpretation of caste ('caste is class') as being somewhat intellectually lazy.

She points out that her own party has made mistakes in the past in not being able to understand the caste issue properly. She critiques the Dalit movement for turning into an identity struggle, reformist not revolutionary, futile in its search for justice within an intrinsically unjust social system. She believes that without dismantling patriarchy and the caste-system, brick, by painful brick, there can be no New Democratic Revolution.

In her writings on caste and gender, Anuradha Ghandy shows us a mind and an attitude that is unafraid of nuance, unafraid of engaging with dogma, unafraid of telling it like it is — to her comrades as well as to the system that she fought against all her life. What a woman she was.

Introduction

Internationally one of the most remarkable developments in the capitalist era has been the emergence and growth of the women's movement. For the first time in human history women came out collectively to demand their rights, their place under the sun. The emancipation of women from centuries of oppression became an urgent and immediate question. The movement threw up theoretical analyses and solutions on the question of women's oppression. The women's movement has challenged the present patriarchal, exploitative society both through its activities and through its theories.

It is not that earlier women did not realize their oppression. They did. They articulated this oppression in various ways – through folk songs, pithy idioms and poems, paintings and other forms of art to which they had access. They also raved against the injustice they had to suffer. They interpreted and re-interpreted myths and epics to express their viewpoint. The various versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharat for example, still in circulation among rural women through songs in various parts of India, are a vivid testimony of this.

Some remarkable women emerged in the feudal period

who sought out ways through the means available at the time and became symbols of resistance to the patriarchal set-up. Meerabai, the woman saint is only one example among many such who left a lasting impact on society. This is time for all societies in the world. This was a counterculture, reflecting a consciousness of the oppressed. But it was limited by circumstances and was unable to find a way out, a path to end the oppression. In most cases they sought a solution in religion, or a personal God.

The development of capitalism brought about a tremendous change in social conditions and thinking. The concept of democracy meant people became important. Liberalism as a social and political philosophy led the change in its early phase; women from the progressive social classes came forward as a collective. Thus, for the first time in history a women's own movement emerged, that demanded from society their rights and emancipation. This movement has, like all other social movements, had its flows and ebbs. The impact of capitalism, however constricted and distorted in the colonies like India, had their impact on progressive men and women.

A women's own movement in India emerged in the first part of the 20th century. It was part of this international ferment and yet rooted in the

contradictions of Indian society. The theories that emerged in capitalist countries found their way to India and got applied to Indian conditions. The same is true in an even more sharp way in the context of the contemporary women's movement that arose in the late 1960s in the West. The contemporary women's movement has posed many more challenges before society because the limits of capitalism in its imperialist phase are now nakedly clear. It had taken much struggle to gain formal legitimacy for the demand for equality. And even after that, equality was still unrealized not just in the backward countries, but even in advanced capitalist countries like USA and France.

The women's movement now looked for the roots of oppression in the very system of society itself. The women's movement analyzed the system of patriarchy and sought the origins of patriarchy in history. They grappled with the social sciences and showed up the male bias inherent in them. They exposed how a patriarchal way of thinking colored all analysis regarding women's role in history and in contemporary society. Women have a history, women are in history they said..(Gerda Lerner) From studies of history they retrieved the contributions women had made to the development of human society, to major movements and struggles. They also exposed

the gender based division of labor under capitalism that relegated an overwhelming majority of women to the least skilled, lowest paid categories. They exposed the way ruling classes; especially the capitalist class has economically gained from patriarchy. They exposed the patriarchal bias of the State, its laws and regulations.

The feminists' analyzed the symbols and traditions of a given society and showed how they perpetuate the patriarchal system. The feminists gave importance to the oral tradition and thus were able to bring to the surface the voice of the women suppressed throughout history. The movement forced men and women to look critically at their own attitudes and thoughts, their actions and words regarding women. The movement challenged various patriarchal, anti-women attitudes that tainted even progressive and revolutionary movements and affected women's participation in them. Notwithstanding the theoretical confusions and weaknesses the feminist movement has contributed significantly to our understanding of the women's question in the present day world. The worldwide movement for democracy and socialism has been enriched by the women's movement.

One of the important characteristics of the

contemporary women's movement has been the effort made by feminists to theorize on the condition of women. They have entered into the field of philosophy in order to give a philosophical foundation to their analysis and approach. Women sought philosophies of liberation and grappled with various philosophical trends which they felt could give a vision to the struggle of women. Various philosophical trends like Existentialism, Marxism, Anarchism, Liberalism were all studied and adopted by active women movement in US and then England. Thus feminists are an eclectic group who include a diverse range of approaches, perspectives and frameworks depending on the philosophical trend they adopt. Yet they share a commitment to give voice to women's experiences and to end women's subordination. Given the hegemony of the West these trends have had a strong influence on the women's movement within India too. Hence a serious study of the women's movement must include an understanding of the various theoretical trends in the movement.

Feminist philosophers have been influenced by philosophers as diverse as Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Derida, Nietzsche, Freud. Yet most of them have concluded that traditional philosophy is male-biased, its major concepts and theories, its own self-

understanding reveals “a distinctively masculine way of approaching the world.” (Alison Jagger). Hence they have tried to transform traditional philosophy. Keeping this background in mind we have undertaken to present some of the main philosophical trends among feminists. One point to take note of is that these various trends are not fixed and separate. Some feminists have opposed these categories. Some have changed their approach over time, some can be seen to have a mix of two or more trends. Yet for an understanding these broad trends can be useful. But before discussing the theories we will begin with a very brief account of the development of the women’s movement in the West, esp the US. This is necessary to understand the atmosphere in which the theoretical developments among feminists grew.

Overview of Women's Movement in the West

The women's movement in the West is divided into two phases. The first phase arose in the mid 19th century and ended by the 1920s, while the second phase began in the 1960s. The first phase is known for the suffragette movement or the movement of women for their political rights, that is the right to vote. The women's movement arose in the context of the growth of capitalism and the spread of a democratic ideology. It arose in the context of other social movements that emerged at the time. In the US the movement to free the black slaves and the movement to organise the ever increasing ranks of the proletariat were an important part of the socio-political ferment of the 19th century.

In the 1830s and 40s the abolitionists (those campaigning for the abolition of slavery) included some educated women who braved social opposition to campaign to free the Negroes from slavery. Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Anthony, Angeline Grimke were among the women active in the anti-slavery movement who later became active in the struggle for women's political rights.

But opposition within the anti-slavery organizations to women representing them and to women in leadership forced the women to think about their own

status in society and their own rights. In the US, women in various States started getting together to demand their right to common education with men, for manned women's rights to property and divorce.

The Seneca Fall Convention organized by Stanton, Anthony and others in 1848 proved to be a landmark in the history of the first phase of the women's movement in the US. They adopted a Declaration of Sentiments modeled on the Declaration of Independence, in which they demanded equal rights in marriage, property, wages and the vote. For 20 years after this Convention state level conventions were held, propaganda campaigns through lecture tours, pamphlets, signature petitions conducted.

In 1868 an amendment was brought to the Constitution (14th amendment) granting the right to vote to blacks but not to women. Stanton, Anthony campaigned against this amendment but were unsuccessful in preventing it. A split between the women and abolitionists took place. Meanwhile the working class movement also grew, though the established trade union leadership was not interested in organising women workers. Only the IWW supported efforts to organise women workers who worked long hours for extremely low wages. Thousands of women were garment workers.

Anarchists, Socialists, Marxists, some of whom were women, worked among the workers and organised them. Among them were Emma Goldman, Ella Reevs Bloor, Mother Jones, Sojourner Truth. In the 1880s militant struggles and repression became the order of the day. Most of the suffrage leaders showed no interest in the exploitation of workers and did not support their movement.

Towards the end of the century and beginning of the 20th century a working class women's movement developed rapidly. The high point of this was the strike of almost 40,000 women garment workers in 1909. The socialist women were very active in Europe and leading communist women like Eleanor Marx, Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollantai, Vera Zasulich were in the forefront of the struggle to organise working women. Thousands of working women were organised and women's papers and magazines were published.

It was at the Second International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen that Clara Zetkin, the German communist and famous leader of the international women's movement, inspired by the struggle of American women workers, moved the resolution to commemorate March 8 as Women's Day at the international level. By the end of the century,

the women's situation had undergone much change in the US. Though they did not have the right to vote, in the field of education, property rights, employment they had made many gains. Hence the demand for the vote gained respectability. The movement took a more conservative turn , separating the question of gaining the right to vote from all other social and political issues. Their main tactics was petitioning and lobbying with senators etc. It became active in 1914 with the entry of Alice Paul who introduced the militant tactics of the British suffragettes, like picketing, hunger strikes, sit-ins etc. Due to their active campaign and militant tactics women won the right to vote in America in 1920.

The women's struggle in Britain started later than the American movement but it took a more militant turn' in the beginning of the 20th century with Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughters and their supporters adopting militant tactics to draw attention to their demands, facing arrest several times to press their demand. They had formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WPSU) in 1903 when they got disillusioned with the style of work of the older organisations. This WSPU spearheaded the agitation for suffrage. But they compromised with the British Government when the First World War broke out in 1914. Both in US and in England the leaders of the

movement were white and middle class and restricted their demand to the middle class women. It was the socialists and communist women who rejected the demand for the vote being limited to those with property and broadened the demand to include the vote for all women, including working class women. They organised separate mass mobilisations in support of the demand for the women's right to vote.

The women's movement did not continue during the period of the Depression, rise of fascism and the world war. In the post Second World War period America saw a boom in its economy and the growth of the middle class. In the war years women had taken up all sorts of jobs to run the economy but after that they were encouraged to give up their jobs and become good housewives and mothers. This balloon of prosperity and contentment lasted till the 1960s. Social unrest with the black civil rights movement gained ground and later the anti-war movement (against the Vietnam War) emerged.

It was a period of great turmoil. The Cultural Revolution that began in China too had its impact. Political activity among university students increased and it is in this atmosphere of social and political turmoil that the women's movement once again emerged, this time initially from among university

students and faculty.

Women realized that they faced discrimination in employment, in wages, and overall in the way they were treated in society. The consumerist ideology also came under attack. Simone de Beauvoir had written The Second Sex in 1949 itself but its impact was felt now. Betty Friedan had written the Feminine Mystique in 1963. The book became extremely popular. She initiated the National Organisation of Women in 1966 to fight against the discrimination women faced and to struggle for equal rights amendment.

But the autonomous women's movement (radical feminist movement) emerged from within the student movement that had leftist leanings. Black students in the Student Non-violent Coordination Council (SNCC) (which campaigned for civil rights for blacks) threw out the white men and women students at the Chicago Convention in 1968, on the grounds that only blacks would struggle for black liberation. Similarly the idea that women's liberation is a women's struggle gained ground.

In this context, women members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) demanded that women's liberation be a part of the national council in their

June 1968 convention. But they were hissed and voted down. Many of these women walked out and formed the WRAP (Women's Radical Action Project) in Chicago. Women within the New University Conference (NUC – a national level body of university students, staff and faculty who wanted a socialist America) formed a Women's Caucus. Marlene Dixon and Naomi Wisstein from Chicago were leading in this. Shulamith Firestone and Pamela Allen began similar activity in New York and formed the New York Radical Women (NYRW). All of them rejected the liberal view that changes in the law and equal rights amendment would solve women's oppression and believed that the entire structure of society has to be transformed. Hence they called themselves radical. They came to hold the opinion that mixed groups and parties (men and women) like the socialist party, SDS, New Left will not be able to take the struggle for women's liberation forward and a women's movement, autonomous from parties is needed. The NYRW's first public action was the protest against the Miss America beauty contest which brought the fledgling women's movement into national prominence.

A year later NYWR divided into Redstockings and WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). The Red Stockings issued their manifesto

in 1969 and in this the position of radical feminism was clearly presented for the first time. "..we identify the agents of our oppression as men, Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism etc) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest..." Sisterhood is powerful, and the personal is political became their slogans which gained wide popularity. Meanwhile the SDS issued its position paper on Women's Liberation in December 1968. This was debated by women from various points of view. Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood wrote Bread and Roses to signify that the struggle cannot be only against economic exploitation of capitalism (bread) but also against the psychological and social oppression that women faced (Roses).

These debates carried out in the various journals produced by the women's groups that emerged in this period were taken seriously and influenced the course and trends within the women's movement not only in the US but in other countries as well. The groups mainly took the form of small circles for consciousness raising. It must be noted that all of these were following either the Trotskite or Cuban socialism within the left movement. They opposed all types of hierarchical structures. In this way the

socialist feminist and the radical feminist trend within the women's movement emerged. Though it had many limitations if seen from a Marxist perspective, it raised questions and brought many aspects of women oppression out into the open.

In the later 1960s and early 70s in the US and Western Europe "different groups had different visions of revolution. There were feminist, black, anarchist , Marxist – Leninist and other versions of revolutionary politics, but the belief that revolution of one sort or another was round the corner cut across these divisions." (Barbara Epstein)

The socialist (Marxist) and radical feminists shared a vision about revolution. During this first period the feminists were grappling with Marxist theory and key concepts like production, reproduction, class consciousness and labor. Both the socialist feminists and radical feminists were trying to change Marxist theory to incorporate feminist understanding of women's position. But after 1975 there was a shift. Systemic analysis (of capitalism, of the entire social structure) was replaced or recast as cultural feminism.

Cultural feminism begins with the assumption that men and women are basically different. It focused on the cultural features of patriarchal oppression and

primarily aimed for reforms in this area. Unlike radical and socialist feminism, it adamantly rejects any critique of capitalism and emphasises patriarchy as the roots of women's oppression and veers towards separatism. In the late 1970s and 1980s, lesbian feminism emerged as one current within the feminist movement. At the same time women of color (Black women, third world women in the advanced capitalist countries) raised criticisms about the ongoing feminist movement and began to articulate their versions of feminism. Organizations among working class women for equal treatment at the workplace, childcare etc also started growing. That the feminist movement had been restricted to white, middle class, educated women in advanced capitalist countries and was focusing on issues primarily of their concern had become obvious. This gave rise to global or multicultural feminism.

In the third world countries women's groups also became active, but all the issues were not necessarily 'purely' women's issues. Violence against women has been a major issue, esp rape, but alongside there have been issues that emerged from exploitation due to colonialism and neo-colonialism, poverty and exploitation by landlords, peasant issues, displacement, apartheid and many other such problems that were important in their own countries.

In the early 1990s post-modernism became influential among feminists. But the right-wing conservative backlash against feminism grew in the 1980s, focusing opposition to the feminist struggle for abortion rights. They also attacked feminism for destroying the family, emphasizing the importance of women's role in the family.

Yet the feminist perspective spread wide and countless activist groups, social and cultural projects at the grassroots grew and continued to be active. Women's studies too spread widely. Health care and environment issues have been the focus of attention of many of these groups. Many leading feminists were absorbed in academic jobs. At the same time many of the major organisations and caucuses have become large institutions, absorbed by the establishment, run with staff and like any established bureaucratic institution. Activism declined.

In the 1990s the feminist movement is known more from the activities of these organisations and the writings of feminists in the academic realm. "Feminism has become more an idea than a movement, and one that lack the visionary quality it once had" wrote Barbara Epstein in Monthly Review (May 2001). In the 1990s the increasing gap between the economic condition of working class and

oppressed minorities and the middle classes, the continuing gender inequality, increasing violence on women, the onslaught of globalization and its impact on people, esp women in the third world has led to a renewed interest in Marxism.

At the same time the participation of Women, esp. young women, in a range of political movements, as evident in the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements, has further helped the process of awakening. With this brief overview of the development of the women's movement in the West we will analyse the propositions of the main theoretical trends within the feminist movement.

1) Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminist thought has enjoyed a long history in the 18th and 19th centuries with thinkers as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 to 1797), Harriet Taylor Mill (1807 to 1858), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815 to 1902) arguing for the rights of women on the basis of liberal philosophical understanding. The movement for equal rights to women, esp the struggle for the right to vote was primarily based on liberal thought.

Earlier liberal political philosophers, like John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau who had argued for the rule of reason, equality of all, did not include women in their understanding of those deserving of equality, particularly political equality. They failed to apply their liberal theory to the position of women in society. The values of liberalism including the core belief in the importance and autonomy of the individual developed in the 17th century.

It emerged with the development of capitalism in Europe in opposition to feudal patriarchal values based on inequality. It was the philosophy of the rising bourgeoisie. The feudal values were based on the belief of the inherent superiority of the elite — esp the monarchs. The rest were subjects, subordinates. They defended hierarchy, with unequal rights and power. In

opposition to these feudal values liberal philosophy advanced a belief in the natural equality and freedom of human beings. "They advocated a social and political structure that would recognize equality of all individuals and Provide them with equality of opportunity. This philosophy was rigorously rational and secular and the most power full and progressive formulation of the Enlightenment period. It was marked by intense individualism. Yet the famous 18th century liberal philosophers like Rousseau and Locke did not apply the same principles to the patriarchal family and the position of women with in it. This was the residual patriarchal bias of liberalism that applied only to men in the market." — Zillah Eisenstein.

Mary Wollstonecraft belonged to the radical section of the intellectual aristocracy in England that supported the French and American Revolutions. She wrote 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' in 1791 in response to Edmund Burke's conservative interpretation of the significance of the French Revolution. In the booklet she argued against the feudal patriarchal notions about women's natural dependence on men, that women were created to please men, that they cannot be independent. Wollstonecraft wrote before the rise of the women's movement and her arguments are based on logic and rationality. Underlying Wollstonecraft's analysis are

the basic principles of the Enlightenment: the belief in the human capacity to reason and in the concepts of freedom and equality that preceded and accompanied the American and French revolutions. She recognized reason as the only authority and argued that unless women were encouraged to develop their rational potential and to rely on their own judgment, the progress of all humanity would be retarded. She argued primarily in favor of women getting the same education as men so that they could also be imbibed with the qualities of rational thinking and should be provided with opportunities for earning and leading an independent life. She strongly criticised Rousseau's ideas on women's education.

According to her, Rousseau's arguments that women's education should be different from that of men have contributed to make women more artificial weak characters. Rousseau's logic was that women should be educated in a manner so as to impress upon them that obedience is the highest virtue. Her arguments reflect the class limitations of her thinking. While she wrote that women from the "common classes" displayed more virtue because they worked and were to some extent independent, she also believed that "the most respectable women are the most oppressed."

Her book was influential even in America at that

time. Harriet Taylor, also part ot the bourgeois intellectual circles of London and wife of the well known Utilitarian philosopher James Stuart Mill , wrote " On the Enfranchisement of Women " in 1851 in support of the women's movement just as it emerged in the US. Giving stark liberal arguments against opponents of women's rights and in favor of women having the same rights as men, she wrote, "We deny the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or any individual for another individual, what is and what is not their "proper sphere". The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to..." Noting the significance of the fact that she wrote 'The world is very young, and has but Just begun to cast off injustice. It is only now getting rid of Negro slavery, Can we wonder it has n o t yet done as much for women?" In fact the liberal basis of the women's movement as it emerged in the mid 19th century in the US is clear in the Seneca Falls Declaration (1848). The declaration at this first national convention began thus: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain in alienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness...."

In the next phase of the women's movement in the

late 1960s among the leading proponents of liberal ideas was Betty Friedan, Bella Abzzug, Pat Schroeder. Friedan founded the organisation National Organisation of Women (NOW) in 1966. The liberal feminists emerged from among those who were working in women's rights groups, government agencies, commissions etc. Their initial concern was to get laws amended which denied equality to women in the sphere of education, employment etc. They also campaigned against social conventions that limited women's opportunities on the basis of gender. But as these legal and educational barriers began to fall it became clear that the liberal strategy of changing the laws within the existing system was not enough to get women justice and freedom. They shifted their emphasis to struggling for equality of conditions rather than merely equality of opportunity.

This meant the demand that the state play a more active role in creating the conditions in 22 which women can actually realise opportunities. The demand for childcare, welfare, healthcare, unemployment wage, special schemes for the single mother etc have been taken up by liberal feminists. The struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has also been led by this section among feminists. The work of the liberal section among feminists has been through national level organisations and thus they

have been noticed by the media as well. A section among the liberal feminists like Zillah Eisenstein argue that liberalism has a potential as a liberating ideology because working women can through their life experiences see the contradiction between liberal democracy as an ideology and capitalist patriarchy which denies them the equality promised by the ideology. But liberalism was not the influential trend within the movement in this phase.

Critique

Liberalism as a philosophy emerged within the womb of feudal western society as the bourgeoisie was struggling to come to power. Hence it included an attack on the feudal values of divinely ordained truth and hierarchy (social inequality). It stood for reason and equal rights for all individuals. But this philosophy was based on extreme individualism rather than collective effort. Hence it promoted the approach that if formal, legal equality was given to all, and then it was for the individuals to take advantage of the opportunities available and become successful in life.

The question of class differences and the effect of class differences on opportunities available to people was not taken into consideration. Initially liberalism played a progressive role in breaking the feudal social and political institutions. But in the 19th century after the growth of the working class and its movements, the limitations of liberal thinking came to the fore. For the bourgeoisie that had come to power did not extend the rights it professed to the poor and other oppressed sections (like women, or blacks in the US). They had to struggle for their rights. The women's movement and the Black movement in that phase were able to demand their rights utilising the arguments of the liberals. Women from the bourgeois classes were

in the forefront of this movement and they did not extend the question of rights to the working classes, including working class women.

But as working class ideologies emerged, various trends of socialism found support among the active sections of the working class. They began to question the very bourgeois socio-economic and political system and the limitations of liberal ideology with its emphasis on formal equality and individual freedom. In this phase liberalism lost its progressive role and we see that the main women's organisations both in the US and England fighting for suffrage had a very narrow aim and became pro-imperialist and anti-working class. In the present phase liberal feminists have had to go beyond the narrow confines of formal equality to campaign for positive collective rights like welfare measures for single mothers, prisoners etc and demand a welfare state.

Liberalism has the following weaknesses:

1. It focuses on the individual rights rather than collective rights.

2. It is ahistorical. It does not have a comprehensive understanding of women's role in history nor has it any analysis for the subordination (subjugation) of

women.

3. It tends to be mechanical in its support for formal equality without a concrete understanding of the condition of different sections/classes of women and their specific problems. Hence it was able to express the demands of the middle classes (white women from middle classes in the US and upper class, upper caste women in India) but not those of women from various oppressed ethnic groups, castes and the working, labouring classes.

4. It is restricted to changes in the law, educational and employment opportunities, welfare measures etc and does not question the economic and political structures of the society which give rise to patriarchal discrimination. Hence it is reformist in its orientation, both in theory and in practice.

5. It believes that the state is neutral and can be made to intervene in favour of women when in fact the bourgeois state in the capitalist countries and the semi-colonial and semi-feudal Indian state are patriarchal and will not support women's struggle for emancipation. The State is defending the interests of the ruling classes who benefit from the subordination and devalued status of women.

6. Since it focuses on changes in the law, and state

schemes for women, it has emphasised lobbying and petitioning as means to get their demands. The liberal trend most often has restricted its activity to meetings and conventions and mobilising petitions calling for changes. It has rarely mobilised the strength of the mass of women and is in fact afraid of the militant mobilisation of poor women in large numbers.

2) Radical Feminism

Within bourgeois feminism, in the first phase of the women's movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries liberalism was the dominant ideology; in the contemporary phase of the women's movement radical feminism has had a strong impact and in many ways, though diffused, many ideas and positions can be traced to the radical feminist argument. In contrast to the pragmatic approach taken by liberal feminism, radical feminism aimed to reshape society and restructure its institutions, which they saw as inherently patriarchal. Providing the core theory for modern feminism, radicals argued that women's subservient role in society was too closely woven into the social fabric to be unraveled without a revolutionary revamping of society itself. They strove to supplant hierarchical and traditional power relationships, which they saw as reflecting a male bias, with non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian approaches to politics and organization.

In the second phase of feminism, in the US, the radical feminists emerged from the social movements of the 1960s – the civil rights movement, the new left movement and the anti-Vietnam war/peace movement. They were women who were dissatisfied with the role given to women in these movements and

the way the new left tackled the women's question in its writings, theoretical and popular. At the same time none of them wanted to preserve the existing system. Hence in its initial phase the writings were a debate with Marxism, an attempt to modify or rewrite Marxism. Later on as the radical feminist movement became strong Marxism was cast aside and the entire emphasis shifted to an analysis of the sex/gender system and patriarchy delinked from the exploitative capitalist system. In this contemporary phase of feminism attention was focused on the origins of women's oppression and many theoretical books were written trying to analyze the forms of women's oppression and tracing the roots of this oppression. Yet one thing that needs to be kept in mind is that in all their writing they kept only their own society in mind.

Hence all their criticism, description and analysis deal with advanced capitalist societies, esp. the US. In 1970 Kate Millett published the book Sexual Politics in which she challenged the formal notion of politics and presented a broader view of power relationships including the relationship between men and women in society. Kate Millett saw the relations between men and women as relationship of power; men's domination over women was a form of power in society. Hence she titled her book sexual politics.

Here she made the claim that the personal was political, which became a popular slogan of the feminist movement. By the personal is political what she meant was that the discontent individual women feel in their lives is not due to individual failings but due to the social system, which has kept women in subordination and oppresses her in so many ways. Her personal feelings are therefore political.

In fact she reversed the historical materialist understanding by asserting that the male female relationship is a framework for all power relationships in society. According to her, this "social caste" (dominant men and subordinated women) supersedes all other forms of inequality, whether racial, political or economic. This is the primary human situation. These other systems of oppression will continue because they get both logical and emotional legitimacy from oppression in this primary situation. Patriarchy according to her was male control over the private and public world. According to her to eliminate patriarchy men and women must eliminate gender, i.e. sexual status, role and temperament, as they have been constructed under patriarchy. Patriarchal ideology exaggerates the biological differences between men and women and subordinates women. Millett advocated a new society, which would not be based on the sex/gender system and in which men and women are

equal. At the same time, she argued that we must proceed slowly, eliminating undesirable traits like obedience (among women) and arrogance (among men). Kate Millett's book was very influential for a long time. It still is considered a classic for modem radical feminist thinking. Another influential early writer was Shulamith Firestone who argued in her book Dialectics of Sex (1970) that the origins of women's subordination and man's domination lay in the reproductive roles of men and women. In this book she rewrites Marx and Engels.

While Engels had written about historical materialism as follows: "that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and great moving power of all historical events in the economic development of society, in the changes of the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and i n the struggles of these classes against one another."

Firestone rewrote this as follows: "Historical materialism is that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinctly biological classes for procreative reproduction, and the struggles of these classes with one another; in the changes in the

mode of marriage, reproduction and childcare created by these struggles; in the connected development of other physically differentiated classes (castes); and in the first division of labour based on sex which developed into the (economic – cultural) class system."

Firestone focused on reproduction instead of production as the moving force of history. Further, instead of identifying social causes for women's condition she stressed biological reasons for her condition and made it the moving force in history. She felt that the biological fact that women bear children is the material basis for women's submission in society and it needs a biological and social revolution to effect human liberation. She too was of the opinion that the sex/gender difference needs to be eliminated and human beings must be androgynous. But she went further than Kate Millett in the solution she advocated to end women's oppression. She was of the opinion that unless women give up their reproductive role and no longer bear children and the basis of the existing family is changed it is not possible to completely liberate women.

Hence, according to her unless natural reproduction was replaced by artificial reproduction, and the traditional biological family replaced by intentional family, biological divisions between the sexes could

not be eliminated. Biological family is the family in which members are genetically connected (parents and children) while the intentional family according to her means a family chosen by friendship or convenience. She believed that if this change occurs the various personality complexes that develop in present society will no longer exist. Others wrote about how historically the first social conflict was between men and women. Man the hunter was prone to violence and he subjugated women through rape. (Susan Brownmiller).

These writings set the tone for the women's movement, the more radical section of it, which was not satisfied with the efforts of liberal feminists to change laws and campaign on such issues. They gave the push to delve into women's traditional hitherto taken for granted reproductive role, into gender/sex differences and to question the very structure of society as being patriarchal, hierarchical and oppressive. They called for a total transformation of society. Hence radical feminists perceive themselves as revolutionary rather than reformist. Their fundamental point is that the sex/gender system is the cause of women's oppression. They considered the man woman relationship in isolation from the rest of the social system, as a fundamental contradiction. As a result their entire orientation and direction of analysis

and action deals primarily with this contradiction and this has taken them towards separatism. Since they focused on the reproductive role of women they make sexual relations, family relations as the central targets of their attack to transform society.

Sex-Gender System and Patriarchy

The central point in the radical feminist understanding is the sex/gender system. According to a popular definition given by Gayle Rubin, the sex/gender system is a "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity". This means that patriarchal society uses certain facts about male and female physiology (sex) as the basis for constructing a set of masculine and feminine identities and behaviour (gender) that serve to empower men and disempower women, that is, how a man should be and how a woman should be. This, according to them, is the ideological basis of women's subordination. Society is somehow convinced that these culturally determined behaviour traits are 'natural'. Therefore they said that 'normal' behaviour depends on one's ability to display the gender identities and behaviour that society links with one's biological sex.

Initially the radical feminists, e.g. the Boston group or the Radical New York group, upheld Kate Millet's and Firestone's views and focused on the ways in which the concept of femininity and the reproductive and sexual roles and responsibilities (child rearing etc) serve to limit women's development as full persons. So they advocated androgyny. Androgyny means being

both male and female, having the traits of both male and female, so that rigid sex defined roles don't remain. This means women should adopt some male traits (and men adopt some female traits.). But later, in the late 70s, one section of radical feminists rejected the goal of androgyny and believed that it meant that women should learn some of the worst features of masculinity. Instead they proposed that women should affirm their "femininity". Women should try to be more like women, i.e. emphasise women's virtues such as interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life. From here onwards their entire focus became separatist, women should relate only to women, they should build a women's culture and institutions.

With this even their understanding about sexuality changed and they believed that women should become lesbians and they supported monogamous lesbian relations as the best for women. Politically they became pacifist. Violence and aggression are masculine traits according to them, that should be rejected. They say women are naturally peace loving and life-giving. By building alternative institutions they believed they were bringing revolutionary change. They began building women's clubs, making women's films and other forms of separate women's culture. In their

understanding revolutionary transformation of society will take place gradually. This stream is called the cultural feminist trend because they are completely concentrating on the culture of society. They are not relating culture to the political-economic structure of society. But this became the main trend of radical feminism and is intertwined with eco-feminism, post-modernism also. Among the well known cultural feminists are Marilyn French and Mary Daly.

Sexuality: Heterosexuality and Lesbianism

Since man-woman relations are the fundamental contradiction for radical feminists they have paid a great deal of attention to sexual relations between men and women. Sexuality has become the arena where most of the discussions and debates of radical feminism got concentrated. The stand of the Christian Churches in the West. regarding various issues including sex and abortion has been extremely conservative. This is more so in countries like the US, France and Italy. Christian morality has defended sex only after marriage and opposed abortion. The radical feminist theorists confronted these questions head on. At the same time they also exposed how in a patriarchal society within sexual relations (even within marriage) women often feel a sense of being dominated.

It is in this background that questions of sexual repression, compulsory heterosexuality and homosexuality or sexual choice became issues of discussion and debate. The radical feminists believe that in a patriarchal society even in sexual relations and practices male domination prevails. This has been termed as repression by the first trend and ideology of sexual objectification by the cultural feminists. According to them sex is viewed as bad, dangerous and

negative. The only sex permitted and considered acceptable is marital heterosexual practice. (Heterosexuality means sexual relations between people of different sexes, that is between men and women). There is pressure from patriarchal society to be heterosexual and sexual minorities, i.e. lesbians, transvestites, transsexuals etc are considered as intolerable. Sexual pleasure, a powerful natural force, is controlled by patriarchal society by separating so-called good, normal, healthy sexual practice from bad, unhealthy illegitimate sexual practice.

But the two streams have very different understanding of sexuality which also affects the demands they make, and solutions they offer. According to the radical feminist trend sexual repression is one of the crudest and most irrational ways for the forces of civilization to control human behaviour. Permissiveness is in the best interests of women and men. On the contrary the cultural feminists consider that heterosexual sexual relations are characterized by an ideology of objectification in which men are masters/subjects and women are slaves/objects. "Hetero-sexualism has certain similarities to colonialism particularly in its maintenance through force when paternalism is rejected and in the portrayal of domination as natural and in the de-skilling of women" (Sarah Lucia Hoagland)

This is a form of male sexual violence against women. Hence feminists should oppose any sexual practice that normalizes male sexual violence. According to them women should reclaim control over their sexuality by developing a concern with their own sexual priorities which differ from the priorities of men. Women, they say, desire intimacy and caring rather than the performance. Hence they advocated that women should reject heterosexual relations with men and become lesbians.

On the other hand the radicals believed that women must seek their pleasure according to Gayle Rubin, not make rules. For the cultural feminists, heterosexuality is about male domination and female subordination and so it sets the stage for pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment and woman-battering. Hence they advocated that women should give up heterosexual relations and go into lesbian relations in which there is emotional involvement.

Cultural feminists emphasized the need to develop the essential "femaleness" of women. Lesbianism was pushed strongly within the women's movement in the West in the early 80s but it receded a few years later. The solution offered by cultural feminists to end the subordination of women is breaking the sexual relationship between men and women with women

forming a separate class themselves. The first trend are advocating free sexual relations, de-linked from any emotional involvement whether with men or with women.

In fact the solutions which they are promoting make an intimate human relationship into a commodity type of impersonal relationship. From here it is one step to support pornography and prostitution. While cultural feminists strongly opposed pornography the radicals did not agree that pornography had any adverse impact on the way men viewed women. Instead they believed that pornography could be used to overcome sexual repression. Even on questions of reproductive technology, the two sides differed. While the radicals supported repro-tech the cultural feminists were opposed to it. The cultural feminists were of the opinion that women should not give up motherhood since this is the only power they have. They have been active in the ethical debates raised by repro-tech, like rights of the surrogate or biological mother.

Critique

From the account given above it is clear that radical feminists have stood Marxism on its head so to speak. Though we will deal with Firestone's arguments in the section on socialist feminists some points need to be mentioned. In their understanding of material conditions they have taken the physical fact of reproduction and women's biological role as the central point for their analysis and concluded that this is the main reason for women's oppression. Marx had written that production and reproduction of life are the two basic conditions for human existence. Reproduction means both the reproduction of the person on a day to day basis and the reproduction of the human species. But in fact reproduction of the species is something humans share with the animal kingdom. That could not be the basis for women's oppression. For in all the thousands of years that people lived in the first stages of human existence women were not subordinated to men. In fact her reproductive role was celebrated and given importance because the survival of the species and the group depended on reproduction. The importance given to fertility and the fertility rituals surviving in most tribal societies are testimony of this fact.

Marxism understands that some material conditions

had to arise due to which the position of women changed and she was subordinated. The significant change in material conditions came with the generation of considerable surplus production. How this surplus would be distributed is the point at which classes arose, the surplus being appropriated by a small number of leading people in the community. Her role in reproduction the cause of her elevated status earlier became a means of her enslavement. Which clan/extended family the children she bore belonged to, became important and it is then that we find restrictions on her and the emergence of the patriarchal family in which the woman was subordinated and her main role in society was begetting children for the family.

Radical feminists have treated historical development and historical facts lightly and imposed their own understanding of man-woman contradiction as the original contradiction and the principal contradiction which has determined the course of actual history. From this central point the radical feminist analysis abandons history altogether, ignores the political-economic structure and concentrates only on the social and cultural aspects of advanced capitalist society and projects the situation there as the universal human condition. This is another major weakness in their analysis and approach. Since they have taken the

man-woman relationship (sex/gender relationship) as the central contradiction in society all their analysis proceeds from it and men become the main enemies of women. Since they do not have any concrete strategy to overthrow this society they shift their entire analysis to a critique of the super structural aspects – the culture, language, concepts, ethics without concerning themselves with the fact of capitalism and the role of capitalism in sustaining this sex/gender relationship and hence the need to include the overthrow of capitalism in their strategy for women's liberation.

While making extremely strong criticisms of the patriarchal structure the solutions they offer are in fact reformist. Their solutions are focused on changing roles and traits and attitudes and the moral values and creating an alternative culture. Practically it means people can to some extent give up certain values, men can give up aggressive traits by recognizing them as patriarchal, women can try to be bolder and less dependent, but when the entire structure of society is patriarchal how far can these changes come without an overthrow of the entire capitalist system is a question they do not address at all. So it ends up turning into small groups trying to change their lifestyle, their interpersonal relations, a focus on the interpersonal rather than the entire system. Though they began by

analyzing the entire system and wanting to change it their line of analysis has taken them in reformist channels. Women's liberation is not possible in this manner.

The fault lies with their basic analysis itself. The cultural feminists have gone one step further by emphasizing the essential differences between males and females and claiming that female traits and values (not feminine) are desirable. This argument gives the biological basis of male female differences more importance than social upbringing. This is in fact a counter-productive argument because conservative forces in society have always used such arguments (called biological determinism) to justify domination over a section of the people. The slaves were slaves because they had those traits and they needed to be ruled, they could not look after themselves. Women are women and men are men and they are basically different, so social roles for women and men are also different. This is the argument given by reactionary conservative forces which are opposed to women's liberation.

Hence the basic argument they are putting forward has dangerous implications and can and will rebound on the struggle of women for change. Masculinity and femininity are constructs of a patriarchal society and

we have to struggle to change these rigid constructs. But it is linked to the overthrow of the entire exploitative society. In a society where patriarchal domination ceases to exist how men and women will be, what kind of traits they will adopt is impossible for us to say. The traits that human beings will then adopt will be in consonance with the type of society that will exist, since there can be no human personality outside some social framework. Seeking this femaleness is like chasing a mirage and amounts to self-deception.

By making heterosexualism as the core point in their criticism of the present system they encouraged lesbian separatism and thus took the women's movement to a dead end. Apart from forming small communities of lesbians and building an alternative culture they could not and have not been able to take one step forward to liberate the mass of women from the exploitation and oppression they suffer. It is impractical and unnatural to think that women can have a completely separate existence from men. They have completely given up the goal of building a better human society. This strategy is not appealing to the large mass of women.

Objectively it became a diversion from building a broad movement for women's liberation. The radical

trend by supporting pornography and giving the abstract argument of free choice has taken a reactionary turn providing justification and support to the sex tourism industry promoted by the imperialists which is subjecting lakhs (100.000s) of women from oppressed ethnic communities and from the third world countries to sexual exploitation and untold suffering. While criticizing hypocritical and repressive sexual mores of the reactionary bourgeoisie and the Church the radical trend has promoted an alternative which only further alienates human beings from each other and debases the most intimate of human relations. Separating sex from love and intimacy, human relations become mechanical and inhuman.

Further, their arguments are in absolute isolation from the actual circumstances of women's lives and their bitter experiences. Maria Mies has made a critique of this whole trend which sums up the weakness of the approach: "The belief in education, cultural action, or even cultural revolution as agents of change is a typical belief of the urban middle class. With regard to the women's question, it is based on the assumption that woman's oppression has nothing to do with basic material production relations. This assumption is found more among Western, particularly American, feminists who usually do not talk of capitalism. For many western feminists women's oppression is rooted

in the culture of patriarchal civilization. For them, therefore, feminism is largely a cultural movement, a new ideology, or a new consciousness." (1986)

This cultural feminism dominated Western feminism and influenced feminist thinking in third world countries as well. It unites well with the post-modernist trend and has deflected the entire orientation of the women's movement from being a struggle to change the material conditions of life of women to an analysis of "representations" and symbols. They have opposed the idea of women becoming a militant force because they emphasise the non-violent nature of the female. They are disregarding the role women have played in wars against tyranny throughout history. Women will and ought to continue to play an active part in just wars meant to end oppression and exploitation. Thus they will be active participants in the struggle for change.

Summing up we can see that the radical feminist trend has taken the women's movement to a dead end by advocating separatism for women.

The main weaknesses in the theory and approach are:

1. Taking a philosophically idealist position by giving central importance to personality traits and cultural

values rather than material conditions. Ignoring the material situation in the world completely and focusing only on cultural aspects.

2. Making the contradiction between men and women as the principal contradiction thereby justifying separatism.

3. Making a natural fact of reproduction as the reason for women's subordination and rejecting socio-economic reasons for the social condition of oppression thereby strengthening the conservative, argument that men and women are naturally different.

4. Making women's and men's natures immutable.

5. Ignoring the class differences among women and the needs and problems of poor women.

6. By propagating women's nature as non-violent they are discouraging women from becoming fighters in the struggle for their own liberation and that of society.

7. Inspite of claiming to be radical having completely reformist solutions which cannot take women's liberation forward.

3) Anarcha-Feminism

The feminist movement has been influenced by anarchism and the anarchists have considered the radical feminists closest to their ideas. Hence the body of work called Anarcha-feminism can be considered as being very much a part of the radical feminist movement.

Anarchists considered all forms of Government (state) as authoritarian and private property as tyrannical. They envisaged the creation of a society which would have no government, no hierarchy and no private property. While the anarchist ideas of Bakunin, Kropotkin and other classic anarchists have been an influence, the famous American anarchist Emma Goldman has particularly been influential in the feminist movement. Emma Goldman, a Lithuanian by birth, migrated to the US in 1885 and as a worker in various garment factories came into contact with anarchist and socialist ideas. She became an active agitator, speaker and campaigner for anarchist ideas. In the contemporary feminist movement the anarchists circulated Emma Goldman's writings and her ideas have been influential.

Anarcha-feminists agree that there is no one version of anarchism, but within the anarchist tradition they

share a common understanding, on (1) a criticism of existing societies, focusing on relations of power and domination, (2) a vision of an alternate, egalitarian, non-authoritarian society, along with claims about how it could be organized, and (3) a strategy for moving from one to the other.

They envisaged a society in which human freedom is ensured, but believe that human freedom and community go together. But the communities must be structured in such a way that makes freedom possible. There should be no hierarchies or authority. Their vision is different from the Marxist and liberal tradition but is closest to what the radical feminists are struggling for, the practice they are engaged in. For the anarchists believe that means must be consistent with the aims, the process by which revolution is being brought about, the structures must reflect the new society and relations that have to be created.

Hence the process and the form of organisation are extremely important. According to the anarchists dominance and subordination depends on hierarchical social structures which are enforced by the State and through economic coercion (that is through control over property etc). Their critique of society is not based on classes and exploitation, or on the class nature of the State etc, but is focused on hierarchy and

domination. The State defends and supports these hierarchical structures and decisions at the central level are imposed on those subordinate in the hierarchy. So for them hierarchical social structures are the roots of domination and subordination in society.

This leads to ideological domination as well, because the view that is promoted and propagated is the official view, the view of those who dominate, about the structure and its processes. Anarchists are critical of Marxists because according to them revolutionaries are creating hierarchical organisations (the party) through which to bring about the change. According to them once a hierarchy is created it is impossible for people at the top to relinquish their power. Hence they believe that the process by which the change is sought to be brought about is equally important. "Within a hierarchical organization we cannot learn to act in non-authoritarian ways." Anarchists give emphasis to "propaganda by deed" by which they mean exemplary actions, which by positive example encourage others to also join. The Anarcha-feminists give examples of groups that have created various community based activities, like running a radio station or a food cooperative in the US in which non-authoritarian ways of running the organization have been developed. They have given central emphasis on

small groups without hierarchy and domination.

But the functioning of such groups in practice, the hidden tyrannical leadership (Joreen) that gets created has led to many criticisms of them. The problems encountered included hidden leadership, having headers' imposed by the media, overrepresentation of middle class women with lots of time in their hands, of lack of task groups which women could join, hostility towards women who showed initiative or leadership. When communists raise the question that the centralized State controlled by the imperialists needs to be overthrown they admit that their efforts are small in nature and there is a need of coordinating with others and linking up with others. But they are not willing to consider the need for a centralized revolutionary organization to overthrow the State.

Basically according to their theory the capitalist state is not to be overthrown, but it has to be outgrown, ("how we proceed against the pathological state structure perhaps the best word is to outgrow rather than overthrow" from an Anarcha-feminist manifesto – Siren 1971).

From their analysis it is clear that they differ strongly from the revolutionary perspective. They do not believe in the overthrow of the bourgeois/imperialist

State as the central question and prefer to spend their energy in forming small groups involved in cooperative activities.

In the era of monopoly capitalism it is an illusion to think that such activities can expand and grow and gradually engulf the entire society. They will only be tolerated in a society with excess surplus like the US as an oddity, an exotic plant. Such groups tend to get co-opted by the system in this way.

Radical feminists have found these ideas suitable for their views and have been very much influenced by anarchist ideas of organization or there has been a convergence of anarchist views of organization and the radical feminist views on the same. Another aspect of Anarcha-feminist ideas is their concern for ecology and we find that eco-feminism has also grown out of Anarcha-feminist views. As it is, anarchists in the Western countries are active on the environmental question.

4) Eco-Feminism

Eco-feminism has also got close links with cultural feminism, though eco-feminists themselves distinguish themselves. Cultural feminists like Mary Daly have taken an approach in their writing which comes close to an eco-feminist understanding. Ynestra King, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies are among the known eco-feminists.

Cultural feminists have celebrated women's identification with nature in art, poetry, music and communes. They identify women and nature against (male) culture. So for example they are active anti-militarists. They blame men for war and point out that masculine pre-occupation is with death defying deeds. Eco-feminists recognize that socialist feminists have emphasized the economic and class aspects of women's oppression but criticize them for ignoring the question of the domination of nature. Feminism and ecology are the revolt of nature against human domination. They demand that we re-think the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature, including our natural, embodied selves.

In eco-feminism nature is the central category of analysis – the interrelated domination of nature – psyche and sexuality, human oppression and non-

human, and the social historical position of women in these. This is the starting point for eco-feminism according to Ynestra King. And in practice it has been seen, according to her, that women have been in the forefront of struggles to protect nature – the example of Chipko andolan in which village women clung to trees to prevent the contractors from cutting the trees in Tehri-Garhwal proves this point, according to them.

There are many streams within eco-feminism. There are the spiritual eco-feminists who consider their spiritualism as main, while the worldly believe in active intervention to stop the destructive practices. They say that the nature-culture dichotomy must be dissolved and our oneness with nature brought out. Unless we all live more simply some of us won't be able to live at all. According to them there is room for men too in this save the earth movement. There is one stream among eco-feminists who are against the emphasis on nature-women connection. Women must, according to them, minimize their socially constructed and ideologically reinforced special connection with nature. The present division of the world into male and female (culture and nature); men for culture building, and women for nature building (child rearing and child bearing) must be eliminated and oneness emphasized. Men must bring culture into

nature and women should take nature into culture. This view has been called social constructionist eco-feminism. Thinkers like Warren believe that it is wrong to link women to nature, because both men and women are equally natural and equally cultural. Mies and Shiva combined insights from socialist feminism (role of capitalist patriarchy), with insights from global feminists who believe that women have more to do with nature in their daily work around the world, and from postmodernism which criticizes capitalism's tendency to homogenizing the culture around the world.

They believed that women around the world had enough similarity to struggle against capitalist patriarchies and the destruction it spawns. Taking examples of struggles by women against ecological destruction by industrial or military interests to preserve the basis of life they conclude that women will be in the forefront of the struggle to preserve the ecology. They advocate a subsistence perspective in which people must not produce more than that needed to satisfy human needs, and people should use nature only as much as needed, not to make money but satisfy community needs, men and women should cultivate traditional feminine virtues (caring, compassion, nurturance) and engage in subsistence production, for only such a society can "afford to live

in peace with nature, and uphold peace between nations, generations, and men and women". Women are non-violent by nature they claim and support this. They are considered as transformative eco-feminists.

But the theoretical basis for Vandana Shiva's argument in favor of subsistence agriculture is actually reactionary. She makes a trenchant criticism of the green revolution and its impact as a whole but from the perspective that it is a form of "western patriarchal violence" against women and nature. She counterposes patriarchal western, rational/science with non-western wisdom. The imperialists used the developments in agro-science to force the peasantry to increase their production (to avoid a Red revolution) and to become tied to the MNC sponsored market for agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides.

But Shiva is rejecting agro-science altogether and uncritically defending traditional practices. She claims that traditional Indian culture with its dialectical unity of Purusha and Prakriti was superior to the Western philosophical dualism of man and nature, man and culture etc etc.

Hence she claims that in this civilization where production was for subsistence, to satisfy the vital basic needs of people, women had a close connection

with nature. The Green revolution broke this link between women and nature. In actual fact what Shiva is glorifying is the petty pre-capitalist peasant economy with its feudal structures and extreme inequalities. In this economy women toiled for long hours in backbreaking labor with no recognition of their work. She does not take into account the 40 condition of Dalit and other lower caste women who toiled in the fields and houses of the feudal landlords of that time, abused, sexually exploited and unpaid most of the time.

Further, the subsistence life was not based on enough for all, in fact women were deprived of even the basic necessities in this glorified pre-capitalist period, they had no claim over the means of production, they were not independent either. This lack of independence is interpreted by her and Mies as the third world women's rejection of self-determination and autonomy for they value their connection with the community. What women value as support structures when they do have any alternative before them is being projected as conscious rejection of self-determination by Shiva. In effect they are upholding the patriarchal pre-capitalist subsistence economy in the name of eco-feminism and in the name of opposing western science and technology. A false dichotomy has been created between science and

tradition.

This is a form of culturalism or post-modernism that is involved in defending the traditional patriarchal cultures of third world societies and opposing development of the basic masses in the name of attacking the development paradigm of capitalism. We are opposed to the destructive and indiscriminate push given by profit hungry imperialist agri-business to agro-technology (including genetically modified seeds etc) we are not against the application of science and agro-technology to improving agricultural production. Under the present class relations even science is the handmaiden of the imperialists but under democratic/socialist system this will not be so.

It is important to retain what is positive in our tradition but to glorify it all, is anti-people. Eco-feminists idealize the relationship of women with nature and also lacks a class perspective. Women from the upper classes, whether in advanced capitalist countries or in the backward countries like India hardly show any sensitivity to nature so absorbed they are in the global, consumerist culture encouraged by imperialism. They do not think that imperialism is a worldwide system of exploitation. They have shown no willingness to change their privileges and basic lifestyle in order to reduce the destruction of the

environment. For peasant women the destruction of the ecology has led to untold hardships for them in carrying out their daily chores like procuring fuel, water, and fodder for cattle. Displacement due to take over of their forests and lands for big projects also affects them badly.

Hence these aspects can and have become rallying points for mobilizing them in struggles. But from this we cannot conclude that women as against men have a "natural" tendency to preserve nature. The struggle against monopoly capitalism, that is relentlessly destroying nature, is a political struggle, a people's issue, in which the people as a whole, men and women must participate. And though the ecofeminist quote the Chipko struggle, in fact there are so many other struggles in our country in which both men and women have agitated on what can be considered as ecological issues and their rights.

The Narmada agitation, the agitations of villagers in Orissa against major mining projects, and against nuclear missile project or the struggle of tribals in Bastar and Jharkhand against the destruction of forests and major steel projects are examples of this.

5) Socialist Feminism

Socialist or Marxist women who were active in the new left, anti-Vietnam war student movement in the 1960s joined the women's liberation movement as it spontaneously emerged. Influenced by the feminist arguments raised within the movement they raised questions about their own role within the broad democratic movement, and the analysis on the women's question being put forward by the New Left (essentially a Trotskyite revisionist leftist trend critical of the Soviet Union and China) o f which they were a part. Though they were critical of the socialists and communists for ignoring the women's question, unlike the radical feminist trend, they did not break with the socialist movement but concentrated their efforts on combining Marxism with radical feminist ideas. There is a wide spectrum amongst them as well.

At one end of the spectrum are a section called Marxist feminists who differentiate themselves from socialist feminist because they adhere more closely to Marx, Engels, and Lenin's writings and have concentrated their analysis on women's exploitation within the capitalist political economy. At the other end of the spectrum are those who have focused on how gender identity is created through child rearing practices. They have focused on the psychological

processes and are influenced by Freud. They are also called psycho-analytic feminists. The term feminist is used by all of them.

Some feminists who are involved in serious study and political activity from the Marxist perspective also call themselves Marxist feminists to denote both their difference from socialist feminists and their seriousness about the woman's question. Marxist feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and others from a feminist group in Italy did a theoretical analysis of housework under capitalism. Dalla Costa argued in detail that through domestic work women are reproducing the worker, a commodity.

Hence according to them it is wrong to consider that only use values are created through domestic work. Domestic work also produces exchange values – the labor power. When the demand for wages for housework arose Dalla Costa supported it as a tactical move to make society realize the value of housework. Though most did not agree with their conclusion that housework creates surplus value, and supported the demand for wages for housework, yet their analysis created a great deal of discussion in feminist and Marxist circles around the world and led to a heightened awareness of how housework serves capital. Most socialist feminists were critical of the

demand but it was debated at length. Initially the question of housework (early 70s) was an important part of their discussion but by the 1980s it became clear that a large proportion of women were working outside the house or for some part of their lives they worked outside the house.

By the early 1980s 45 % of the total workforce in the US was female. Then their focus of study became the situation of women in the labour force in their countries. Socialist feminists have analysed how women in the US have been discriminated against in jobs and wages. The gender segregation in jobs too (concentration of women in certain types of jobs which are low wage) has been documented in detail by them. These studies have been useful to expose the patriarchal nature of capitalism. But for the purpose of this article, only the theoretical position regarding women's oppression and capitalism that they take will be considered by us. We will present the position put forward by Heidi Hartmann in a much circulated and debated article, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" to understand the basic socialist feminist position.

According to Heidi Hartmann Marxism and feminism are two sets of systems of analysis which have been married but the marriage is unhappy because only

Marxism, with its analytic power to analyse capital is dominating. But according to her while Marxism provides an analysis of historical development and of capital it has not analysed the relations of men and women. She says that the relations between men and women are also determined by a system which is patriarchal, which feminists have analysed.

Both historical materialist analysis of Marxism and patriarchy as a historical and social structure are necessary to understand the development of western capitalist society and the position of women within it, to understand how relations between men have been created and how patriarchy has shaped the course of capitalism. She is critical of Marxism on the women's question. She says that Marxism has dealt with the women's question only in relation to the economic system. She says women are viewed as workers, and Engels believed that sexual division of labour would be destroyed if women came into production, and all aspects of women's life are studied only in relation to how it perpetuates the capitalist system. Even the study on housework dealt with the relation of women to capital but not to men. Though Marxists are aware of the sufferings of women they have focused on private property and capital as the source of women's oppression. But according to her, early Marxists failed to take into account the difference in men's and

women's experience of capitalism and considered patriarchy a left over from the earlier period. She says that Capital and private property do not oppress women as women; hence their abolition will not end women's oppression. Engels and other Marxists do not analyse the labour of women in the family properly. Who benefits from her labour in the house she asks -not only the capitalist, but men as well. A materialist approach ought not to have ignored this crucial point. It follows that men have a material interest in perpetuating women's subordination.

Further her analysis held that though Marxism helps us to understand the capitalist production structure, its occupational structure and its dominant ideology its concepts like reserve army. Wage labourer, class are gender-blind because it makes no analysis about who will fill these empty places, that is, who will be the wage labourer, who will be the reserve army etc etc. For capitalism anyone, irrespective of gender, race, and nationality, can fill them. This, they say, is where the woman's question suffers.

Some feminists have analysed women's work using Marxist methodology but adapting it. Juliet Mitchell for example analysed woman's work in the market, her work of reproduction, sexuality and child-rearing. According to her, the work in the market place is

production, the rest is ideological. For Mitchell patriarchy operates in the realm of reproduction, sexuality and child-rearing. She did a psychoanalytical study of how gender based personalities are formed for men and women. According to Mitchell, "we are dealing with two autonomous are as: the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy." Hartmann disagrees with Mitchell because she views patriarchy only as ideological and does not give it a material base.

According to her the material base o f patriarchy is men's control over women's labour power. They control it by denying access to women over society's productive resources (denying her a job with a living wage) and restricting her sexuality. This control according to her operates not only within the family but also outside at the work place. At home she serves the husband and at work she serves the boss. Here it is important to note that Hartmann makes no distinction between men of the ruling classes and other men. Hartmann concluded that there is no pure patriarchy and no pure capitalism. Production and reproduction are combined in a whole society in the way it is organized and hence we have what she calls patriarchal capitalism.

According to her there is a strong partnership between

patriarchy and capitalism. Marxism she feels underestimated the strength and flexibility of patriarchy and overestimated the strength of capital. Patriarchy has adapted and capital is flexible when it encounters earlier modes of production and it has adapted them to suit its needs for accumulation of capital. Women's role in the labour market, her work at home is determined by the sexual division of labour and capitalism has utilized them to treat women as secondary workers and to divide the working class. Some other socialist feminists do not agree with Hartmann's position that there are two autonomous systems operating, one, capitalism in the realm of production, and two, patriarchy in the realm of reproduction and ideology and they call this the dual systems theory Iris Young for example believes that Hartmann's dual system makes patriarchy some kind of a universal phenomenon which is existing before capitalism and in every known society makes it ahistorical and prone to cultural and racial bias. Iris Young and some other socialist feminists argue that there is only one system that is capitalist patriarchy.

According to Young the concept that can help to analyse this clearly is not class, because it is gender-blind, but division of labour. She argues that the gender based division of labour is central, fundamental to the structure of the relations of production.

Among the recently more influential socialist feminists are Maria Mies (she also has developed into an eco-feminist) who also focuses on division of labour – "The hierarchical division of labor between men and women and its dynamics for man integral part of dominant production relations, i.e. class relations of a particular epoch and society and of the broader national and international divisions of labour."

According to her a materialist explanation requires us to analyse the nature of women's and men's interaction with nature and through it build up their human or social nature. In this context she is critical of Engels for not considering this aspect. Femaleness and maleness are defined in each historical epoch differently. Thus in earlier what she calls matristic societies women were significant for they were productive – they were active producers of life. Under capitalist conditions this has changed and they are housewives, empty of all creative and productive qualities. Women as producers of children and milk, as gatherers and agriculturists had a relation with nature which was different from that of men. Men related to nature through tools. Male's supremacy came not from superior economic contribution but from the fact that they invented destructive tools through which they controlled women, nature and other men. Further she adds that it was the pastoral economy in

which patriarchal relations were established. Men learnt the role of the male in impregnation. Their monopoly over arms and this knowledge of the male role in reproduction led to changes in the division of labour. Women were no longer important as gatherers of food or as producers, but their role was breeding children. Thus she concludes that, "we can attribute the a symmetric division of labour between men and women to this predatory mode of production, or rather appropriation, which is based on male monopoly over means of coercion, i.e. arms and direct violence by means of which permanent relations of exploitation and dominance between the sexes was created and maintained."

To uphold this, the family, state and religion have played an important part. Though Mies says that we should reject biological determinism, she herself veers towards it. Several of their proposals for social change, like those o f radical feminists, are directed towards transformation of man-woman relations and the responsibility of rearing children. The central concern of socialist feminists according to her is reproductive freedom. This means that women should have control over whether to have children and when to have children.

Reproductive freedom includes the right to safe birth

control measures, the right to safe abortion, day care centres, a decent wage that can look after children, medical care, and housing. It also includes freedom of sexual choice; that is the right to have children outside the socio-cultural norm that children can only be brought up in a family of a woman with a man. Women outside such arrangements should also be allowed to have and bring up children. And child rearing in the long run must be transformed from a woman's task to that o f men and women. Women should not suffer due to childlessness or due to compulsory motherhood. But they recognize that to guarantee all the above, the wage structure of society must change, women's role must change, compulsory heterosexuality must end, the care of children must become a collective enterprise and all this is not possible within the capitalist system. The capitalist mode of production must be transformed, but not alone, both (also mode of procreation) must be transformed together.

Among later writers an important contribution has come from Gerda Lerner. In her book, The Creation of Patriarchy, she goes into a detailed explanation of the origins of patriarchy. She argues that it is a historical process that is not one moment in history, due, not to one cause, but a process that proceeded over 2500 years from about 3100 B.C. to 600 B.C. She

states that Engels in his pioneering work made major contributions to our understanding of women's position in society and history. He defined the major theoretical questions for the next hundred years. He made propositions regarding the historicity of women's subordination but he was unable to substantiate his propositions. From her study of ancient societies and states she concludes that it was the appropriation of women's sexual and reproductive capacity by men that lies at the foundation of private property; it preceded private property.

The first states (Mesopotamia and Egypt) were organized in the form of patriarchy. Ancient law codes institutionalized women's sexual subordination (men control over the family) and slavery and they were enforced with the power of the state. This was done through force, economic dependency of women and class privileges to women of the upper classes. Through her study of Mesopotamia and other ancient states she traces how ideas, symbols and metaphors were developed through which patriarchal sex/gender relations were incorporated into Western civilization. Men learnt how to dominate other societies by dominating their own women. But women continued to play an important role as priestesses, healers etc as seen in goddess worship. And it was only later that women's devaluation in religion also took place.

Socialist feminists use terms like mechanical Marxists, traditional Marxists to economistic Marxists as those who uphold the Marxist theory concentrating on study and analysis of the capitalist economy and politics and differentiate themselves from them. They are criticising all Marxists for not considering the fight against women's oppression as the central aspect of the struggle against capitalism. According to them organizing women (feminist organizing projects) should be considered as socialist political work and socialist political activity must have a feminist side to it.

Socialist-Feminist strategy for women's liberation

After tracing the history of the relationship between the left movement and the feminist movement in the US, a history where they have walked separately, Hartmann strongly feels that the struggle against capitalism cannot be successful unless feminist issues are also taken up. She puts forward a strategy in which she says that the struggle for socialism must be an alliance with groups with different interests (e.g. women's interests are different from general working class interests) and secondly she says that women must not trust men to liberate them after revolution. Women must have their own 48 separate organisation and their own power base. Young too supports the formation of autonomous women's groups but thinks that there are no issues concerning women that do not involve an attack on capitalism as well.

As far as her strategy is concerned she means that there is no need for a vanguard party to make revolution successful and that women's groups must be independent of the socialist organisation. Jagger puts this clearly when she writes that, "the goal of socialist feminism is to overthrow the whole social order of what some call capitalist patriarchy in which women suffer alienation in every aspect of their lives.

The socialist feminist strategy is to support some "mixed" socialist organisations. But also form independent women's groups and ultimately an independent womens movement committed with equal dedication to the destruction of capitalism and the destruction of male dominance. The women's movement will join in coalitions with other revolutionary movements, but it will not give up its organizational independence."

They have taken up agitations and propaganda on issues that are anti-capitalist and against male domination. Since they identify the mode of reproduction (procreation etc) as the basis for the oppression of women, they have included it in the Marxist concept of the base of society. So they believe that many of the issues being taken up like the struggle against rape, sexual harassment, for free abortion are both anti-capitalist and a challenge to male domination. They have supported the efforts of developing a women's culture which encourages the collective spirit. They also support the efforts to build alternative institutions, like health care facilities and encouraged community living or some form of midway arrangement. In this they are close to radical feminists. But unlike radical feminists whose aim is that these facilities should enable women to move away from patriarchal, white culture into their own

haven, socialist feminists do not believe such a retreat is possible within the framework of capitalism. In short socialist feminists see it as a means of organizing and helping women, while radical feminists see it as a goal of completely separating from men. Socialist feminists, like radical feminists believe that efforts to change the family structure, which is what they call the cornerstone of women's oppression must start now. So they have been encouraging community living, or some sort of mid way arrangements where people try to overcome the gender division in work sharing, looking after children, where lesbians and heterosexual people can live together.

Though they are aware that this is only partial, and success cannot be achieved within a capitalist society they believe it is important to make the effort. Radical feminists assert that such arrangements are "living in revolution." That means this act is revolution itself. Socialist feminists are aware that transformation will not come slowly, that there will be periods of upheaval, but these are preparations.

So this is their priority. Both radical feminists and socialist feminists have come under strong attack from black women for essentially ignoring the situation of black women and concentrating all their analysis on the situation of white, middle class women and

theorizing from it. For example, Joseph, points out the condition of black slave women who were never considered "feminine". In the fields and plantations , in labour and in punishment they were treated equal to men. The black family could never stabilize under conditions of slavery and black men were hardly in a condition to dominate their women, slaves that they were. Also later on, black women have had to work for their living and many of them have been domestic servants in rich white houses. The harassment they faced there, the long hours of work make their experience very different from that of white women. Hence they are not in agreement with the concepts of family being the source of oppression (for blacks it was a source of resistance to racism), on dependence of women on men (black women can hardly be dependent on black men given the high rates of unemployment among them) and the reproduction role of women (they reproduced white labour and children through their domestic employment in white houses). Racism is an all pervasive situation for them and this brings them in alliance with black men rather than with white women. Then white women themselves have been involved in perpetuating racism, about which feminists should introspect she argues. Initially black women hardly participated in the feminist movement though in the 1980s slowly a black feminist movement has developed which is trying to

combine the struggle against male domination with the struggle against racism and capitalism. These and similar criticisms from women of other third world countries has given rise to a trend within feminism called global feminism. In this context post-modernism also gained a following among feminists.

Critique

Basically if we see the main theoretical writings of socialist feminists we can see that they are trying to combine Marxist theory with radical feminist theory and their emphasis is on proving that women's oppression is the central and moving force in the struggle within society. The theoretical writings have been predominantly in Europe and the US and they are focused on the situation in advanced capitalist society. All their analysis is related to capitalism in their countries. Even their understanding of Marxism is limited to the study of dialectics of a capitalist economy.

There is a tendency to universalize the experience and structure of advanced capitalist countries to the whole world. For example in South Asia and China which have had a long feudal period we see that women's oppression in that period was much more severe. The Maoist perspective on the women's question in India also identifies patriarchy as an institution that has been the cause of women's oppression throughout class society. But it does not identify it as a separate system with its own laws of motion. The understanding is that patriarchy takes different content and forms in different societies depending on their level of development and the specific history and

condition of that particular society; that it has been and is being used by the ruling classes to serve their interests. Hence there is no separate enemy for patriarchy.

The same ruling classes, whether imperialists, capitalists, feudals and the State they control, are the enemies of women because they uphold and perpetuate the patriarchal family, gender discrimination and the patriarchal ideology within that society. They get the support of ordinary men undoubtedly who imbibe the patriarchal ideas, which are the ideas of the ruling classes and oppress women. But the position of ordinary men and those of the ruling classes cannot be compared. Socialist feminists by emphasizing reproduction are underplaying the importance of the role of women in social production. The crucial question is that without women having control over the means of production and over the means of producing necessities and wealth how can the subordination of women ever be ended? This is not only an economic question, but also a question of power, a political question.

Though this can be considered in the context of the gender based division of labour in practice their emphasis is on relations within the heterosexual family and on ideology of patriarchy. On the other

hand the Marxist perspective stresses women's role in social production and her withdrawal from playing a significant role in social production has been the basis for her subordination in class society. So we are concerned with how the division of labour, relations to the means of production and labour itself in a particular society is organized to understand how the ruling classes exploited women and forced their subordination. Patriarchal norms and rules helped to intensify the exploitation of women and reduce the value of their labour.

Supporting the argument given by Firestone, socialist feminists are stressing on women's role in reproduction to build their entire argument. They take the following quotation of Engels: "According to the materialist conception , the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular epoch live is determined by both kinds of production." (Origin of the family. Private property and the State).

On the basis of this quotation they make the point that in their analysis and study they only concentrated on production ignoring reproduction altogether. Engels' quote gives the basic framework of a social formation. Historical materialism, our study of history, makes it clear that any one aspect cannot be isolated or even understood without taking the other into account. The fact is that throughout history women have played an important role in social production and to ignore this and to assert that women's role in the sphere of reproduction is the central aspect and it should be the main focus is in fact accepting the argument of the patriarchal ruling classes that women's social role in reproduction is most important and nothing else is.

The socialist feminists also distort and render meaningless the concept of base and superstructure in their analysis. Firestone says that (and so do socialist feminists like Hartmann) reproduction is part of the base. It follows from this that all social relations connected with it must be considered as part of the base the family, other man-women relations, etc. If all the economic relations and reproductive relations are part of the base the concept of base becomes so broad that it loses its meaning altogether and it cannot be an analytic tool as it is meant to be. Gender based division of labour has been a useful tool to analyse the

patriarchal bias in the economic structure of particular societies. But the socialist feminists who are putting forward the concept of gender division of labour as being more useful than private property are confusing the point, historically and analytically. The first division of labour was between men and women. And it was due to natural or biological causes — the role of women in bearing children. But this did not mean inequality between them — the domination of one sex over another.

Women's share in the survival of the group was very important – the food gathering they did, the discovery they made of growing and tending plants, the domestication of animals was essential for the survival and advance of the group. At the same time further division of labour took place which was not sex based. The invention of new tools, knowledge of domesticating animals, of pottery, of metal work, of agriculture, all these and more contributed to making a more complex division of labour. All this has to be seen in the context of the overall society and its structure ~ the development of clan and kinship structures, of interaction and clashes with other groups and of control over the means of production that were being developed. With the generation of surplus, with wars and the subjugation of other groups who could be made to labour, the process of

withdrawal of women from social production appears to have begun.

This led to the concentration of the means of production and the surplus in the hands of clan heads/ tribe heads begun which became manifest as male domination. Whether this control of the means of production remained communal in form, or whether it developed in the form of private property, whether by then class formation took place fully or not is different in different societies. We have to study the particular facts of specific societies. Based on the information available in his time, Engels traced the process in Western Europe in ancient times, it is for us to trace this process in our respective societies. The full fledged institutionalization of patriarchy could only come later, that is the defence of or the ideological justification for the withdrawal of women from social production and their role being limited to reproduction in monogamous relationships, could only come after the full development of class society and the emergence of the State.

Hence the mere fact of gender division of labour does not explain the inequality. To assert that gender based division of labour is the basis of women's oppression rather than class still begs the question. If we do not find some social, material reasons for the inequality

we are forced into accepting the argument that men have an innate drive for power and domination. Such an argument is self-defeating because it means there is no point in struggling for equality. It can never be realized. The task of bearing children by itself cannot be the reason for this inequality, for as we have said earlier it was a role that was lauded and welcomed in primitive society. Other material reasons had to arise that v/as the cause, which the radical and socialist feminists are not probing. In the realm of ideology socialist feminists have done detailed analyses exposing the patriarchal culture in their society, e.g. the myth of motherhood.

But the one-sided emphasis by some of them who focus only on ideological and psychological factors makes them loose sight of the wider socio-economic structure on which this ideology and psychology is based. In organizational questions the socialist feminists are trailing the radical feminists and anarcha-feminists. They have clearly placed their strategy but this is not a strategy for socialist revolution. It is a completely reformist strategy because it does not address the question of how socialism can be brought about. If, as they believe, socialist/communist parties should not do it then the women's groups should bring forth a strategy of how they will overthrow the male of the monopoly bourgeoisie. They are

restricting their practical activities to small group organizing, building alternative communities, of general propaganda and mobilizing around specific demands. This is a form of economistic practice. These activities in themselves are useful to organize people at the basic level but they are not enough, to overthrow capitalism and to take the process of women's liberation ahead. This entails a major organising work involving confrontation with the State — its intelligence and armed power.

Socialist feminists have left this question aside, in a sense left it to the very revisionist and revolutionary parties whom they criticize. Hence their entire orientation is reformist, to undertake limited organizing and propaganda within the present system. A large number of the theoreticians of the radical feminist and socialist feminist trend have been absorbed in high paying, middle class jobs esp. in the universities and colleges and this is reflected in the elitism that has crept into their writing and their distance from the mass movement. It is also reflected in the realm of theory One Marxist feminist states, " By the 1980s however many socialist and Marxist feminists working in or near universities and colleges not only had been thoroughly integrated into the professional middle class but had also abandoned historical materialism's class analysis..."

6) Post-modernism and Feminism

The criticism of feminists from non-white women led a section of feminists to move in the direction of multi-culturalism and postmodernism. Taking off from the existentialist writer Simone de Beauvoir they consider that woman is the "other" (opposed to the dominant culture prevailing, e.g. dalits. adivadis, women, etc). Post-modemist feminists are glorifying the position of the "Other" because it is supposed to give insights into the dominant culture of which she is not a part. Women can therefore be critical of the norms, values and practices imposed on everyone by the dominant culture. They believe that studies should be oriented from the values of those who are being studied, the subalterns, who have been dominated. Post-modernism has been popular among academics. They believe that no fixed category exists, in this case, woman. The self is fragmented by various identities – by sex, class, caste, ethnic community, race. These various identities have a value in themselves. Thus this becomes one form of cultural relativism.

Hence, for example, in reality no category of only woman exists. Woman can be one of the identities of the self there are others too. There will be a dalit woman, a dalit woman prostitute, an upper caste woman, and such like. Since each identity has a value

in itself, no significance is given to values towards which all can strive. Looked at in this way there is no scope to find common ground for collective political activity. The concept woman, helped to bring women together and act collectively. But this kind of identity politics divides more than it unites. The unity is on the most narrow basis.

Post-modernists celebrate difference and identity and they criticize Marxism for focusing on one "totality" – class. Further post-modernism does not believe that language (western languages atleast) reflects reality. They believe that identities are "constructed" through "discourse". Thus, in their understanding, language constructs reality. Therefore many of them have focused on "deconstruction" of language, hi effect this leaves a person with nothing – there is no material reality about which we can be certain. This is a form of extreme subjectivism. Post-modemist feminists have focused on psychology and language. Post-modernism, in agreement with the famous French philosopher Foucault, are against what they call "relations of power". But this concept of power is diffused and it is not clearly defined.

Who wields the power? According to Foucault it is only at the local level, so resistance to power can only be local. Is this not the basis of NGO functioning

which unites people against some local corrupt power and make adjustments with the power above, the central and state govts. In effect post-modernism is extremely divisive because it promotes fragmentation between people and gives relative importance to identities without any theoretical framework to understand the historical reasons for identity formation and to link the various identities. So we can have a gathering of NGOs like WSF where everyone celebrates their identity – women, prostitutes, gays, lesbians, tribals, dalits etc etc., but there is no theory bringing them under an overall understanding, a common strategy. Each group will resist its own oppressors, as it perceives them. With such an argument, logically, there can be no organization, at best it can be spontaneous organisation at the local level and temporary coalitions. To advocate organisation according to their understanding means to reproduce power – hierarchy, oppression. Essentially they leave the individual to resist for himself or herself, and are against consistent organized resistance and armed resistance.

Carole Stabile, a Marxist feminist has put it well when she says, "Anti-organisational bias is part and parcel of the post – modernist package. To organize any but the most provisional and spontaneous coalitions is, for post- modernist social theorists and feminists alike , to

reproduce oppression, hierarchies , and forms of intractable dominance. The fact that capitalism is extremely organized makes little difference , because one resists against a multivalent diffuse form of power. Nor, as Joreen pointed out over two decades ago, does it seem to matter that structurelessness produces its own forms of tyranny. Thus,in place of any organized politics, postmodernist social theory offers us variations on pluralism , individualism , individualized agency, and ultimately individualized solutions that have never – and will never – be capable of resolving structural problems." (1997)

It is not surprising that for the postmodernists, capitalism, imperialism etc do not mean anything more than one more form of power. While post-modernism in its developed form may not to be found in a semi-colonial society like India, yet many bourgeois feminists have been influenced by it. Their vehement criticism of revolutionary and revisionist organisations on grounds of bureaucracy and hierarchy also reflects the influence of postmodernism in recent times.

Summing up

We have presented in brief, the main theoretical trends in the feminist movements as they have developed in the West in the contemporary period. While the debate with Marxism and within Marxism dominated the 1970s, in the 1980s cultural feminism with its separatist agenda and focus on the cultural aspects of women's oppression came to the fore. Issues of sexual choice and reproductive role of women came to dominate the debate and discussions in feminist circles. Many socialist feminists too have given significance to these questions though not in the extreme form that cultural feminists have. Transformation of the heterosexual family became the main call of the bourgeois feminist movement and the more active sections among them tried to bring it into practice as well. Though many of them may have envisaged a change in the entire social system in this way in fact it became a reformist approach which they have tried to theorize.

Postmodernism made its influence felt in the 1990s. Yet in the late 1990s Marxism is again becoming an important theory within feminist analysis. This critical overview of the way the feminist movement (particularly the radical feminist and socialist feminist trends) theoretically analysed women's oppression, the

solutions they have offered and strategies they evolved to take the movement forward we can say that flaws in their theory have led to advocating solutions which have taken the movement into a dead end. Inspite of the tremendous interest generated by the movement and wide support from women who were seeking to understand their own dissatisfactions and problems the movement could not develop into a consistent broad based movement including not only the middle classes but also women from the working class and ethnically oppressed sections.

The main weaknesses in their theory and strategies were:

Seeking roots of women's oppression in her reproductive role. Since women's role in reproduction is determined by biology, it is something that cannot be changed. Instead of determining the material, social causes for origin of women's oppression they focused on a biologically given factor thereby falling into the trap of biological determinism.

In relation with her biological role focusing on the patriarchal nuclear family as the basic structure in society in which her oppression is rooted. Thus their emphasis was on opposing the heterosexual family as the main basis of women's oppression. As a result the

wider socio-economic structure in which the family exists and which shapes the family was ignored.

Making the contradiction between men and women as the main contradiction. Concentrating their attention on changing the sex/gender system – the gender roles that men and women are trained to play. This meant concentrating on the cultural, psychological aspects of social life ignoring the wider political and economic forces that give rise to and defend patriarchal culture.

Emphasising the psychological/personality differences between men and women as biological and advocating separatism for women. Overemphasis on sexual liberation for women Separate groups, separate live-in arrangements and lesbianism. Essentially this meant that this section of the women's movement confined itself to small groups and could not appeal to or mobilize the mass of women.

Falling into the trap of imperialism and its promotion of pornography, sex-tourism etc by emphasizing the need for liberating women from sexual repression. Or in the name of equal opportunities supporting women's recruitment into the US Army before the Iraq War (2003).

Organizational emphasis on opposition to hierarchy

and domination and focus on small consciousness raising groups and alternative activity, which is self-determined. Opposing the mobilization and organizing of large mass of oppressed women.

Ignoring or being biased against the contributions made by the socialist movements and socialist revolutions in Russia, China etc in bringing about a change in the condition of large sections of women.

How incorrect theoretical analysis and wrong strategies can affect a movement can be clearly seen in the case of the feminist movement. Not understanding women's oppression as linked to the wider exploitative socio-economic and political structure, to imperialism, they have sought solutions within the imperialist system itself. These solutions have at best benefited a section of middle class women but left the vast mass of oppressed and exploited women far from liberation. The struggle for women's liberation cannot be successful in isolation from the struggle to overthrow the imperialist system itself.

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